



SPRING • 2006

Veterans' Health

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

Serving our
returning service
men and women

Surviving
a disaster

Easing into
pollen season

VA Healthcare
System of Ohio



To our readers



Spring is a time to enjoy the outdoors and appreciate our families. In this issue, we show you how to prepare for a disaster (see pages 4–5). Hurricane Katrina reminds us of the importance of having a plan. On page 3, Dorian Lebeau, a veterans' social worker, shares how he survived combat duty and the hurricane. On pages 6–7, you'll also learn how to beat the allergy season and how to keep mold from your home. Please visit our Web site for more information. Best wishes for a safe and healthy spring!

—Clyde Parkis, Network Director

Attention OIF/OEF returning service men and women!

Please visit VA Healthcare System of Ohio's Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) Web site at www1.va.gov/visn10/oifoef/default.html to get great information about your healthcare at VA. There's information about our services, eligibility and benefits—right at your fingertips! Call any of our points of contact to let us know how we can help serve you.

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The Mission of VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

ON THE COVER: VETERAN DORIAN LEBEAU, U.S. ARMY RESERVE MAJOR



About our mailing list

We make every effort to ensure our mailing lists are accurate. If you have questions or would like to be added to or deleted from the list, let us know. Please include your entire address. To make a change, you *must* mail the mailing panel to:

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Veterans' Health is online at

www.va.gov/visn10/. Visit this site to view back issues or subscribe.

Understanding PTSD

When your loved one returns from combat, he or she may need more than a big hug and a good meal. About 20 percent of veterans will come home suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). You can help your loved one by learning to recognize PTSD symptoms and helping him or her get the right treatment early.

Signs of PTSD include:

- nightmares, upsetting flashbacks or frightening thoughts
- social withdrawal
- depression, anxiety or guilt
- angry outbursts and inappropriate rage
- trouble sleeping
- nervousness
- problems concentrating
- use of drugs or alcohol

Treatment options include educational classes, group therapy and one-on-one counseling. **VH**

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A veterans' social worker survives 'double jeopardy'

Dorian Lebeau's brave story

No sooner had Dorian Lebeau returned from two years of combat duty in Afghanistan and Iraq than he was on the run again—this time from Hurricane Katrina. With just the clothes on his back and his sleeping bag in hand, Lebeau evacuated New Orleans by car just as the storm began its deadly assault.

"It seemed strange because I was still transitioning from active duty when the hurricane hit, and I lost all my personal possessions," Lebeau, a U.S. Army Reserve major, recalls. After leaving his rental home, which was destroyed by 10 feet of floodwaters, Lebeau drove 14 hours before he found an available hotel room in Oxford, Ala.

Although the ordeal was draining, Lebeau handled it with strength and determination. "I'm a faith-oriented person, and I relied on my higher power and my family to help me work through it," he says. "I tried to think positively, and the fact that I had been in Iraq and Afghanistan actually gave me some of the coping tools I needed."

What also helped was the warm and supportive group he later became part of at Chillicothe VA Medical Center. Before Katrina, Lebeau, a licensed

social worker, helped HIV-positive mothers and their children at the privately run Children's Hospital in New Orleans. The week before the hurricane, he had accepted a new job as social worker with VA at Chillicothe. He had just given the hospital two weeks' notice.

His new "family" at VA couldn't have been more helpful, he says.

Aware of his situation even before he arrived, they made sure his new apartment was in order for him to move in. Once on the job, his co-workers went out of their way to help with offers of furniture, clothing and any other goods or services he needed.

Perhaps most importantly, they provided the friendship and emotional support that have helped Lebeau—who suffers from serious lung and nerve damage as a result of his tours of duty in the Middle East—get back on his feet.

"I'm doing just fine," he reports. Insurance money from the storm has helped him replace many of his lost belongings. And his new job has kept him very focused. "I love working with veterans," he says. "Because I'm also a disabled veteran, I feel this is something I've been guided to do. Things have worked out very well for me." **VH**

Dorian Lebeau, a U.S. Army Reserve major, survived both Hurricane Katrina and combat duty in Afghanistan and Iraq.





Are you prepared for a disaster?

Making a plan is smart strategy

As last year's hurricanes in the Gulf Coast demonstrated, veterans and their loved ones need to be ready for an emergency. Whether it's a fire, tornado, blizzard, electrical outage or serious accident, getting prepared now can save lives later.

"We encourage all veterans to have an emergency plan for evacuating their home in case of fire, flood or some other disaster," says Molly Lyons, patient safety officer of VA Healthcare System of Ohio. "That includes having a list of all their current medicines and at least a seven-day supply ready to take with them."

How prepared are you for a disaster? Ask yourself these key questions to determine the answer:

Do I have a plan for evacuating my home? The Red Cross says every plan should include evacuation or escape routes, and you should spell out how family members will communicate in a disaster. Most importantly, everyone should know the plan and practice it.

Have I prepared an emergency kit? This easy-to-carry kit should contain water, food, medicines, first-aid supplies, important documents and personal hygiene items.



Have I stored enough water? Having an ample supply of clean water is a top priority in an emergency. You should store one gallon of water per person per day, and keep at least a three-day supply on hand. Store water in thoroughly washed, plastic containers such as soft-drink bottles. Avoid using containers that will decompose or break, like milk cartons or glass bottles. Seal containers tightly, label them and store them in a cool, dark place. Replace the water every six months. If you need to find water outside your home in an emergency, sources include rain-water, streams, rivers, ponds, lakes and natural springs. Boil water for three to five minutes before drinking it.

Have I stored the right foods and in the right quantities? It's smart to store at least a

three-day supply of nonperishable food. Select compact and lightweight foods that require no refrigeration, preparation or cooking. If you must heat food, pack a can of sterno. (*See “Foods that can sustain you in an emergency.”*)



Do I have a first-aid kit ready? The Red Cross recommends you have one for your home and another for your car. Kits are available at your local drugstore, or you can make one with various size bandages, gauze pads, adhesive tape, antibacterial ointment, cold pack, scissors and tweezers.

Have I thought about medicines? This is critical. Have at least a seven-day supply on hand, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines (like aspirins or nonaspirin pain relievers). If you take medicines that require refrigeration, like insulin, have a small ice chest and cold packs ready to travel. Don't forget to make a complete list of your medicines to bring with you.

The manufacturers of aspart (Novolog), glargine (Lantus), NPH and regular insulin recommend storing their medicine in the refrigerator—but not freezing them—until ready to use. If you can't refrigerate NPH or regular insulin, the manufacturer recommends keeping it as cool as possible and never using it past the expiration date. The American Diabetes Association recommends keeping



Foods that can sustain you in an emergency

Here are some imperishable foods the Red Cross recommends you have in your disaster supply kit:

- ready-to-eat canned meats and vegetables
- canned fruits and fruit juices
- ready-to-eat cereals and uncooked instant cereals
- high-energy snacks like granola bars, dried fruit and canned nuts
- food for infants, if necessary
- staples like salt, pepper and sugar
- vitamins and mineral or protein supplements to ensure adequate nutrition

insulin at room temperature and discarding it after one month.

Are my important documents stored in a safe place? Important papers should be in a lockbox at a bank, with copies kept at home. If you must keep originals at home, put them in a color-coded folder you can grab easily if you have to evacuate.

If you think getting prepared for a disaster is foolish, listen to VA social worker Dorian Lebeau (*see his story on page 3*), who lost nearly every personal possession because, as he now admits, he *wasn't* ready for Hurricane Katrina: “I definitely learned a lesson. You should always have an evacuation route and emergency plan in place to deal with traumatic situations like the one I went through.”

For more information about how you and your family can prepare for an emergency, visit the Web site of VA Emergency Medical Strategic Healthcare Group at www.va.gov/emshg/. **VA**

Extending a helping hand

Ohio's VA organization reaches out to Katrina victims

Doctors, nurses, engineers and other personnel from VA Healthcare System of Ohio played an active role in helping victims of last year's Gulf Coast hurricanes, particularly Katrina. Some 81 employees were dispatched to Louisiana, Texas and other disaster relief sites to lend a helping hand. Most stayed for about three weeks. Doctors and nurses worked in mobile clinics, shelters and VA hospitals that suddenly found themselves swamped with people in urgent need of medical care. Engineers from VA helped out in ways as basic as clearing brush and fallen trees from roadways on hospital grounds.

Chillicothe VA Medical Center refurbished a trailer being used for patient outreach and sent it to the hurricane-stricken region to serve as a mobile clinic. Healthcare professionals from Chillicothe drove the trailer to New Orleans and staffed it for several weeks. The well-equipped vehicle is still on-site, being used by a local hospital for desperately needed community outreach.

“We're ready to help again,” says Jim Vorell, area emergency manager, VA Healthcare System of Ohio. “We're already getting geared up for the 2006 hurricane season—though we hope we never have to roll.”

Easing the sneezing

How to survive pollen season

Many poems have been written about the beauty of springtime, but it's a good bet the poets didn't suffer from allergies. Pollen released by trees, grasses or weeds can trigger symptoms that make daily life a challenge during the allergy season. "Avoidance measures like staying indoors with the windows closed and the air conditioning on will help reduce the allergy burden," says Jonathan Bernstein, M.D., associate professor of medicine at the University of Cincinnati and an allergist/immunologist with the Bernstein Allergy Group in Cincinnati. "But that's not always easy or possible for those who are outdoor enthusiasts or those who work outdoors."

Managing mold at home

Many people with allergies find they're also sensitive to mold. They may suffer from skin rashes or hives, sneezing fits, watery eyes, sinus congestion, aches and pains, bloody nose, headache and cough. If you have symptoms that seem to worsen in a damp, moldy room, you may have a mold allergy. Some indoor and outdoor molds are more common during pollen season—from spring to fall—and thrive when the weather turns warm and humid.

You can control moisture and mildew in your home by:

- keeping fabrics clean and dry (soil promotes mildew growth)
- cleaning air ducts if you suspect there's mold inside
- keeping the humidity in your home below 50 percent
- fixing leaks in pipes and damp areas around tubs and sinks
- preventing water seepage into your home
- regularly checking potential problem areas for musty odors

Short of living in a bubble or moving to a different part of the country, you can't dodge all pollen—but you don't have to suffer. Follow these precautions to avoid getting sidelined from your allergies:

Watch the pollen count. Pollen counts are most often higher in the morning and on warm, dry, breezy days. And, they're at their lowest when it's chilly and wet. Check online or tune into your local radio or TV weather report for your area's pollen count so you can plan your day. You may want to postpone your daily walk until evening when it's more comfortable. When the pollen count is high, put off working in the garden or mowing the grass until levels are lower. Use a dust mask if outdoor activity is unavoidable.

Turn on the air. Shut the windows and use air conditioning at home and in the car. Buying an air-purifying device for your bedroom can help you sleep more soundly.

Try over-the-counter (OTC) medications. OTC antihistamines can relieve itching and sneezing, but some may make you drowsy. OTC decongestants reduce nasal congestion and dry up excess mucus but may cause jitters or sleeplessness. Read

Are allergy shots right for you?

Allergy shots, or immunotherapy, can desensitize you to specific allergens and reduce or eliminate the need for medications. An allergist injects small amounts of allergens (the substances to which you react) once or twice a week for three to six months and then monthly for three to five years. You may be a candidate for allergy shots if:

- medication doesn't ease your allergy symptoms
- you aren't able to take allergy medications without side effects
- your allergies trigger asthma
- your symptoms are severe and cause your quality of life to suffer
- you face a lengthy allergy season
- avoiding allergens isn't possible

Tell your doctor whether you are pregnant or take beta-blockers, because allergy shots can cause serious complications.

See your *Healthwise for Life* book to learn about allergies, prevention and treatment.



product labels for side effects. “You can also try over-the-counter eye-drops and a cromolyn sodium nasal spray, like Nasalcrom,” suggests Dr. Bernstein.

Consider prescription options. If OTC drugs don’t help, talk to your doctor about prescription drugs. Your doctor may also prescribe anti-inflammatory drugs like corticosteroids or bronchodilators if you begin to have asthma symptoms. If you’ve suffered from frequent hay fever attacks in the past, your doctor can help you avoid developing a more serious problem such as chronic sinusitis or nasal polyps. Your doctor can order medications to help you avoid getting such problems.

Start treatment before the sneezing. If you know you suffer from seasonal allergies, it’s best to start taking your medications a week or two before you expect the pollen to fly. “Allergy medications should be used regularly rather than on an as-needed basis,” says Dr. Bernstein. “Having your medication onboard ahead of time will help reduce symptoms.”

If you have any questions about allergies, contact your primary care provider. **VH**



Hay fever signs and symptoms

Your risk of developing allergies is 48 percent if one parent has an allergic condition but 70 percent if both parents have allergies.

Some hay fever symptoms are more obvious than others:

- a runny or stuffy nose
- red, swollen, itchy or watery eyes
- repeated and prolonged sneezing
- an itchy throat or roof of the mouth
- itchy ears
- allergic shiners (swollen, bluish skin under the eyes)
- postnasal drip and cough
- sleeplessness, fatigue and irritability
- facial pressure and pain

Reaching us is easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

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Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics Athens

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Ft. Thomas VA Campus

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Lawrenceburg, IN 47025
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Louis Stokes Wade Park VAMC

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Brecksville VA Medical Center

10000 Brecksville Road
Brecksville, OH 44141
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Akron, OH 44319
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Canton

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East Liverpool

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Lorain

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Painesville, OH 44077
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Ravenna

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Ravenna, OH 44266
330-296-3641

Sandusky

3416 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, OH 44870
419-625-7350

Warren

Riverside Square
1400 Tod Avenue NW
Warren, OH 44485
330-392-0311

Youngstown

2031 Belmont Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

Chalmers P. Wylie Outpatient Clinic

543 Taylor Avenue
Columbus, OH 43203
614-257-5200

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Grove City
1953 Ohio Avenue
Grove City, OH 43123
614-257-5800

Marion

1203 Delaware Avenue
Marion, OH 43302
740-223-8089

Zanesville

840 Bethesda Drive
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740-453-7725

Dayton VAMC

4100 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45428
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Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Lima
1303 Bellefontaine Avenue
Lima, OH 45804
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Richmond

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